

International Examples of the United States Heritage Area Concept

Heritage areas similar to those in the United States do exist in many other countries, including countries in Europe and South America, Canada and Mexico, and increasingly in China. Local and national governments have supported the creation of heritage areas, as have international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the European Union, UNESCO, and the World Bank.

The greatest number of heritage areas is found in European countries, where, called by a variety of names, they have become increasingly common since the 1970's. In general, heritage areas have been motivated by the desire to conserve evidence of national heritage and European regional identity in an era of globalization and growing homogeneity. As in the US, these projects involve territories of different sizes and historical themes, managed by partnership entities, with no control over land use.

The European Union (EU) has encouraged the formation of heritage areas by providing support for regional projects that encourage cooperation among cities and areas with distinctive cultural or natural features that bind them together, even across national boundaries. The EU provides no central source for funding heritage areas, however, support for related projects is a priority in a number of important development programs, for example: The Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development Program earmarked almost \$200 million (1998-2002) for "city of tomorrow and cultural heritage" efforts to inventory, conserve, and promote sustainable development of regional heritage resources.¹ The Intereg Program, which has funded many heritage area projects, is providing about \$270 million per year (2000-2004) for regional economic and cultural development promoting regional identity, cultural awareness, and sustainability.² The EU and the Council of Europe also support the European Heritage Network, an extensive database and information exchange on heritage projects, programs, funding, and

best practice across the continent. Heritage areas have used these resources, in combination with national and local support, to plan for and develop heritage assets.

The nature and extensiveness of heritage areas in Europe varies from country to country, as does the level of national support. However, important examples of Heritage area development can be found in almost every country. One interesting aspect of the movement is the growing number of heritage areas being created in Eastern Europe, where traditional settings and ways of life have survived amidst economic dislocation. In these places conservation of heritage and distinctive cultural landscapes is seen as essential in the transition to a market economy because it provides a vehicle for regeneration and sustainable development. Many of the individual heritage areas and several national programs that have been created in Europe are innovative and could inform the evolution of national heritage areas in the US. Some particularly relevant examples are discussed below.

Britain: Industrial heritage areas

England includes some of the earliest and most important historic sites related to the industrial revolution and has pioneered the creation of heritage areas to conserve and develop these resources. Heritage and conservation projects are locally driven and managed but benefit from generous national support made available through the Heritage Lottery Fund, which provided about \$58 million for cultural landscape, townscape, and local heritage area projects in 2004 (out of a total income of over \$500 million primarily earmarked for building preservation), and from English Heritage grants.³

A pioneering example of a British heritage area is ***Ironbridge Gorge*** organized beginning in the late 1960's. It encompasses six square miles of territory along the River Severn in Shropshire where an 18th century landscape of early iron mines, foundries, and mills is conserved amidst functioning towns and contemporary development. The project involves a consortium of local municipalities; the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, and the private Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. The museum operates 10 landmark interpretive sites with an annual income of \$11 million. Since its founding, over \$50 million in private donations coupled with support from

English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and other sources have been used to preserve and interpret key sites and encourage conservation of the valley landscape.⁴ A more recent example is the *Derwent Valley World Heritage Area*, established in 2001, which includes historic mills, towns, canals, and landscape along 18 miles of the Derwent River, where integrated textile manufacturing was first developed by Sr. William Arkwright beginning in 1769. The project is managed by the Derwent Valley Mills Partnership representing local governments, non-profit cultural and development agencies, English Heritage, and UNESCO. A Management Action Plan spells out specific funding and implementation responsibilities of the partners, who have agreed to “conserve the unique and important cultural landscape of the Derwent Valley ... to interpret and promote its assets; and to enhance its character, appearance and economic well-being in a sustainable manner.”⁵ Approximately \$2.1 million (2001) per year has been budgeted for studies and capital projects, derived from the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage grants, and local government contributions.⁶ The partnership promotes conservation and economic development; it has no land use control but provides financial incentives to private owners to encourage re-use and incorporate interpretation within their sites.

France: Regional environment parks

Since 1968, 42 nationally designated “regional parks” have been established in France to help conserve cultural landscapes combining scenic and heritage resources that illustrate aspects of French culture and that are now threatened either with rampant urbanization or loss of economic productiveness.⁷ These projects include urban and rural areas that range in size up from a few hundred up to a thousand square miles. While Regional Environment Parks receive federal designation and support, they are completely distinct from French National Parks that, as in the US, involve premier resources of high integrity on lands owned entirely by the government.

French Regional Environment Parks have many similarities to US National Heritage Areas, and the French program illustrates some lessons that might be transferable to the US. The goals of the program are to: Conserve areas and themes of national importance; contribute to rational land use planning in these areas; promote the use of heritage and natural resources for economic

social and cultural development; educate and inform public; and create a supportive network of projects and institutions. To achieve this at each park, the national government joins in partnership with local governments and the private sector in an “innovative contractual process”. Proposed areas must undergo a planning process leading to a “park charter” that establishes goals, actions, implementation measures and responsibilities. Boundaries are negotiated by all the partners and must, along with the “park charter”, be ratified by municipalities involved. Charters extend for a ten-year time frame, after which they must be reviewed and renewed. Once designated, the regional parks can use the official seal of the program, widely recognized in France, to promote environmental quality and heritage. Most parks are managed by local partnership organizations with a small permanent staff and many volunteers. The national government contributes up to \$1.1 million per year to assist each project, matched by funds from local governments and private partners.⁸

An example project is *Vosges du Nord*, covering an area of 476 sq miles in Alsace-Lorraine, the northwest corner of France, in which 76,000 people live.⁹ The unusual sandstone landscape includes remains of early glassmaking and iron industries, distinctive regional architecture, and defensive fortifications dating from medieval times through the Maginot Line fortifications of the 1930’s. Regional tour routes and recreational trails link urban and rural interpretive sites that convey the story of the region.

Scandinavia: Eco-museums and parks

With a history dating back to the 1890’s, eco-parks blossomed in Scandinavia in the 1970’s as a movement to pull education and interpretation out of tradition museums and into the active landscape of cities, towns and settings that capture cultural heritage, sites, and stories of regional and national significance. They have been described as museums without walls or museums “in situ” (rather than museums in buildings), where local residents and groups are the curators who define, protect, enhance and explain the unique characteristics of their own area and way of life. Paralleling the American notion of Heritage Areas, they involve territories of differing sizes, sometimes disaggregated, bounded by the extent of a particular historical economic activity or regional culture.

Eco-museums are typically managed by local non-profit groups with government assistance. They focus on conservation and educational programs and the re-use of heritage resources to attract tourism and compatible economic development. In many places they are seen as a means to maintain local and national identity and distinctiveness in the face of increasing European homogeneity. Such “museums” may acquire landmark buildings and sites to conserve them for educational purposes, exhibits, or visitor services, or to help preserve them through private re-use, however, eco-museums are not concerned with land use controls, zoning, or large-scale development, relying on incentives and educational programs to raise public consciousness about the special qualities of the territory and the values of conservation. Today there are over a dozen major projects of this type in Scandinavian countries and many more elsewhere in Europe, particularly the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Portugal.¹⁰

A prime example of an eco-park is *Ecomuseum Bergsladen* in Sweden, encompassing the country’s historic iron mining area, which declined in the last century. The project was initiated in the late 1980’s with the mission to “reinforce the sense of identity of the inhabitants, to exalt the characteristic aspect of the region, and to foster tourism development.” It includes over 50 interpreted sites spread across seven municipalities, including mines, villages, furnaces, an oil refinery, and mills interlinked by a network of historic roads, rails, and canals all intertwined with the contemporary environment. The project is managed by a non-profit foundation established by the municipalities, with a small annual budget of about \$200,000 funded by them and the national government of Sweden. Significantly, the foundation owns no property or collections; it provides planning, coordination, development assistance, conservation, and educational services through a network of over 1200 volunteers who work with local sites owned by private citizens, societies, and associations.¹¹

Germany: Emsher Park

There are many eco-museum type projects and regional heritage areas in west and east Germany, however, the premier example is *Emsher Park*, encompassing an area of the Ruhr Valley that was Germany’s industrial heartland from the 19th century. Steel mills, coke smelters, coal mines, and chemical plants were abandoned in the 1970’s, leaving a degraded physical environment and economic decline. The Emsher Park project was initiated in 1989 by the state of North Rhine-

Westphalia to reclaim the natural ecology of the area while conserving and redeveloping its industrial heritage for new economic uses, recreation and culture. A non-profit corporation, IBA Emsher Park, was established to plan and coordinate a 10-year long initiative involving local municipalities, institutions, and private developers in over 100 projects spread over an area of 800 square kilometers along the River Emsher.¹² Included have been an integrated set of historic building re-use efforts combined with compatible new construction of research centers; restoration of watercourses and brownfield sites; creation of museums, cultural facilities, and public parks; and heritage education programs.

IBA Emsher Park develops no projects of its own and has no direct influence over local municipalities, developers or private property. Instead, it has encouraged joint ventures between local governments and private companies, and advocated for financing from private, state and federal government programs, and the European Union. By 1999, over \$3 billion in public and private funds had been channeled through IBA Emsher Park projects that have transformed the landscape and economic base of the region.¹³

Spain: Llobregat River Corridor

Spain, too, has many regional heritage projects. One of the more innovative is along the *Llobregat River Corridor*, stretching 120 miles from the Pyrenees south to Barcelona and the Mediterranean. The Llobregat is known as the “hardest working river in Europe.” From the 19th century it provided a source of power for industry, including textile mills that created the wealth of Barcelona, and a source of water and fertile soil that nourished its population. By the 1980’s, the textile mills were abandoned and agricultural lands were threatened with pollution and urban encroachment. Nevertheless, the river landscape preserved an extraordinary record of industrial and social development including historic bridges, irrigation channels, dams, factories, textile communities, mines and railroads. These are now being conserved, interpreted and developed through an integrated series of local and regional initiatives. For example, the Museum of Science and Technology of Catalunya has developed several theme museums on textiles, railroads, coal mining, and other industries. Taking a page from American heritage areas, a new regional plan has organized the river corridor into a series of seven thematic areas and “gateway”

interpretive sites. Regional public investments in infrastructure and interpretation are prioritized towards projects that help to implement the plan.

Two of the theme areas have been organized into heritage areas, with support and funding from the regional and national (Catalan) governments. *Parc Agrari del Baix Llobregat* encompasses agricultural lands in the river delta, covering some 15 square miles bordered by the dense Barcelona metropolitan area, with a total population over 2.5 million inhabitants. An authority representing over 1500 small agricultural concerns in the delta, 14 local municipalities, and the regional and Catalan governments, manages the park and provides funding. It is charged to conserve agricultural land, historic irrigation channels, haciendas and farming settlements; restore ecological balance; advocate for sensitive development; and establish educational institutions in the delta to research urban agriculture and economic development. *Parc de les Colonies del Llobregat* extends for 18 miles along the river north of Barcelona, encompassing fifteen historic textile mill towns, or “Colonies”, located with eight contemporary municipalities with a total population of about 12,000 people. It is managed by an autonomous Board of Trustees representing local municipalities and chaired by the regional government. The park is organized around a regional tour route linking key scenic and historic sites and museums operated by civic organizations. The park advocates for conservation and economic regeneration of the area through tourism and private re-use of historic infrastructure, working with private owners, banks, and government agencies.¹⁴

Heritage Areas in Asia and China

Given the tremendous economic development now going on in Asia, it is worth noting that there has been a parallel development of heritage areas in Japan, Vietnam, and China. In China, these projects have been motivated in part by a national drive to inscribe sites on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. Many of the 29 Chinese sites involve large areas and city-regions with emerging management partnerships.¹⁵ For example, six historic *Yangtze River canal towns* dating from the Ming Dynasty have joined in a single designation and are now cooperating to develop regional conservation and tourism development strategies. The port city of *Ningbo* has adopted a strategy of preservation, education, and economic development to conserve and re-use

its historic urban fabric and countryside with a history dating back to medieval China. The project was initiated in the early 1990's following the decline of traditional shipping and distribution industries; it is managed by a partnership between the city, international agencies and universities using International Development Association and Chinese government funding. Some projects have been inspired by US National Heritage Areas. For example, in Yunnan Province the I&M and Ohio and Erie Canals have provided the model for organizing a heritage area along the *Tea Route and Southern Silk Road*. Towns along the historic trade route are the most ethnically diverse in China and have adopted a partnership program to promote culture, conservation, sustainable development, and international tourism. Projects of these types are receiving increasing attention and support from the national government, with assistance from the World Bank and UNESCO.

Endnotes

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Dennis Frenchman, MIT
77 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139
Hdennis@mit.edu

